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PLANNING AHEAD WITH AMERICAN HOMEMAKERS

(Transcript of tape-recorded interview by Miss Frances Scudder, Director of the Division of Home Economics Programs, and Jack Towers of the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, for Clear Channel broadcasts on September 8 and 9, 1956.)

Jack Towers (Introductory remarks leading into:) Let's see now, Miss Scudder, your title is "Director of the Division of Home Economics Programs" of Federal Extension. Wonder why they say Home Economics programs.

Miss Scudder: Other people may wonder about that, too, Jack. It really doesn't matter. But just like homemaking, there are many problems to be solved so there are many programs. Some of them, as you would guess, have to do with general homemaking. Others concern questions of managing family business affairs, health, safety, and human relationships. These are all part of the homemaker's concern.

Jack: All over the country, of course, home demonstration agents have many programs in mind, and as they work with them, you might say they teach "across the board."

Scudder: That's right. They, like homemakers, are concerned with many things. For example, in the morning perhaps a homemaker may stop in to talk with the Home Demonstration Agent about the kitchen she is getting ready to remodel--the home demonstration agent may spend the rest of that morning preparing to help local leaders who in turn will help other women make over winter clothing for the children. In the afternoon she may be off to a meeting to see how the women are getting along who are trying to lose weight--by eating better.

Jack: And maybe somebody wants some help in gardening.

Scudder: Yes, or to know where to get the house plan charts.

Jack: Well, I can see that a home demonstration agent must lead an interesting and considerably varied life. And she can never get bored doing one thing because it is always time to do something else.

Scudder: That's certainly true--though all her activity is part of the plan for helping people to solve their own problems.

Jack: Do you think, offhand Miss Scudder, that the agent of say 5 or 10 years from now will be as busy and do as many things as she does now?

Scudder: I surely do--but I also think she is going to be busy with some rather different kinds of things. We are still going to eat and wear clothes and live in houses. But there will be other things to consider. Undoubtedly how we manage our time and how we manage our money and how we get all the things done in the community are going to be of increasing concern.

Jack: Now do you mean, from a community point of view or still from a family point of view?

Scudder: Both--but I was thinking primarily of the family point of view because many of the things we want for our families have to do with working with other people in the community. For instance, how we are going to take care of our seriously sick people--how we are going to provide recreation for the children--or the kind of libraries we want--all those have to do with working with other people in order to have them for the family.

Jack: Miss Scudder, I don't want to bring up a problem but--do you think you can actually get more home economics graduates--more home demonstration agents--to do this bigger job that you are thinking about?

Scudder: Well, that question is certainly to the point. In ten years--yes. Right now for the next year or two we are going to be short of home demonstration agents. In fact we are going to be short of all home economists because the girls of that age, you see, come from the time of the depression--when there just weren't many children. And so now there just aren't many girls that age. But I am very optimistic that we are going to have more home economists before very long and then, as now, the home demonstration job will be an exciting one.

Jack: Well, how does a home economist interested in this kind of work know whether she is qualified -- or where she should go to talk this over -- and find out how to get into this work?

Scudder: First of all, Jack, she is qualified if she has graduated from an accredited school or college of home economics. Then she can talk to her home demonstration agent right in the county where she lives, or if she doesn't happen to know who that is, she can always write to the home demonstration leader who is at the State college.

Jack: Do you consider this a real good job?

Scudder: Those of us who are in it are most enthusiastic about it--but naturally there are some others who don't like the diversity you were talking about, and they may prefer research, for example, or to teach children or do other kinds of home economics work.

Jack: Now back to our crystal ball, and looking ahead with American homemakers--especially those who will turn to the extension service with their home and family problems--are you thinking about the farm homemaker?

Scudder: Well, her among others.

Jack: Speaking of rural and urban, or farm and city, as you like, it's hard to tell these days, just who came from where, isn't it?

Scudder: It surely is. And it gets harder all the time. Because of the greater moving around that we are all doing and because of the papers and the magazines and radio and TV--the whole standard of urban living seems to be spreading out from the cities. It wasn't too long ago that we used to say, "You can't tell which women are the farm women....and we used to mean that

you can't tell from the way they look. But I haven't heard that expression in years....have you?

Jack: No....I don't believe I have.

Scudder: And now our homes look very much alike....the food we have is more nearly alike. As the farm has become more mechanized....and as the factories require less physical labor, we have all changed the way we eat. We eat lighter meals. One of the problems in over-weight is having been used to heavier meals and now not needing as much food as we did.

Jack: What do you mean, Miss Scudder--that the farm family essentially buys its groceries from the grocery store and doesn't produce as much of its own food on the farm as it used to? Is that it?

Scudder: Yes....And that's another point to consider in the years ahead. Some families will continue to have gardens, of course, but many more will be deciding what to buy, and how much of the cooking they are going to want done for them by the processor.

Jack: You mentioned this business of greater mobility....Would you explain that a little more, Miss Scudder? You mean being able to get around in a community from day to day faster....or is it something in addition to this?

Scudder: It's more--Jack. It's exchanging ideas because we move around faster....because we have cars....or there's good bus service or because there are good roads. It isn't difficult to move around and see new things these days. Also, we are changing where we live at a faster rate than was once true. The family may buy another farm or father may take a job in another place....The family moves oftener than it used to.

Jack: I certainly see that that would have a lot to do with the way people get ideas. Now let's talk about housing for a minute. New homes are becoming more simplified and better arranged of course, and older ones are being done over. This, it would seem to me, would make more leisure time for homemakers--Wouldn't you agree?

Scudder: I surely would...and whether you call it leisure or not...there are many things, as we pointed out earlier, that have to be done in a community, if we are going to have the kind of opportunities that we want for the family. Better housing does provide time...let's say....whether it enables women to have more time with their families....whether more time in the community, or whether more time to keep better records or to do more careful shopping. There are all sorts of things than need to be done.

Jack: It's hard to call that leisure....but it certainly gives a person an opportunity to do different things from what they used to.

Scudder: That's right....Simplified and streamlined housekeeping certainly is one way many women are using to provide that extra time.

Jack: The other day, Miss Scudder, I was reading and I was amazed to learn that more than a fourth of the married women in the United States...in fact 28 percent to be exact, now work outside the home....That's more than one in

every four, compared with only 15 percent in 1940. No doubt some of them take part in home demonstration work too, and will continue even after they leave to work outside the home.

Scudder: I think that's right....because it's when you're trying to do two jobs that you become much more aware of the need to be more efficient and to have your home well managed and smoothly run....So that you work well and efficiently without spending more time at it than you want to....or than you have the physical energy to spend.

Jack: I'm no expert at these things, of course, but another change that we notice in today's family is how folks are turning to outside agencies for many things....from help in bringing up the children to....well, managing finances.

Scudder: That's true...you see we've turned to the banks and other credit agencies all these years for money for the big expenditures. But I think we are beginning to sense that planning for all expenditures is important.... especially when we have all the fascinating new things to look at and to want. We need some judgment in terms of what the family really wants in the long run...what we call important...so that we can go ahead and buy the things that we need and want and plan on, instead of all the things we would love to have and that are such a temptation to buy.

Jack: Well, you know in days gone by, women used to be busy providing for the family and keeping house, and they just didn't have need to be concerned much about finances, at least finances as they deal with budgets and the like.

Scudder: Yes....Finances in the smaller day-to-day or week-to-week planning. I'm sure our grandmothers knew the big things that were happening to the family and certainly with grandad, she had a part in the big decisions. She provided much of what the family needed by her own effort. She raised a garden, she made the clothes, and we could go on and on. Today it is more a matter of trying to make the money stretch...to buy the kind of things that everyone in the family wants....to make decisions as to what it really is that we as a family feel is important and where we are going to spend our money. Using the family income wisely is getting a lot more attention by women....and men too...I think than once was true.

Jack: I take it the home demonstration agent would have some guidance to offer a family who wanted her help along these lines.

Scudder: Yes...Not to tell any family what to do or what to spend....but to help families think through their family living costs and plan ways to meet them. It's often the quarters and dimes that go, no one quite knows where, and they don't buy much of anything you want. Or it's the emergency that needs to be met which leads many families to look upon a plan as a help rather than as a restraint.

Jack: Do you feel that better planning is going to be a continuing trend, Miss Scudder?

Scudder: I do, Jack. I would assume so and we will become increasingly manager-minded...not only about our money but about our time and our energy as well.

Jack: What other changes do you see ahead?

Scudder: One interesting change that is occurring is the increased democracy among family members...and the changing roles of family members. The increased sharing of many family tasks between father...mother...and the children. Women are interested in...and taking part in...many of the business affairs once thought to be men's area...and men are sharing in many family activities once done exclusively by women. Children are encouraged to express themselves on major family decisions, and so it goes. Understanding human relationships...and the ability to work easily with others...are recognized as important....and are included in the home demonstration program.

Jack: You certainly have put your finger on a number of ways in which study for home and family living is changing...and I gather that you feel the home demonstration programs will reflect these changes.

Scudder: Yes....looking ahead, there will be homemaking skills as we usually think of them. There will also be the skills of management....using time and energy and money to provide the things we want most....much attention to good buying....to good work space...and to the human understanding which is needed in the family, and for work with others in the community.

Jack: If I remember, Miss Scudder, you say that the basic aim in home demonstration work is to help women learn and apply the new findings of home economics research.

Scudder: Yes....we have always felt that decisions should be based on knowledgethat the practicability of new knowledge often needs to be demonstratedthat the process of analyzing problems, finding the two or three ways they can be solved...and deciding what to do is the basis of progress for the individual....for the family....and for the community.

Jack: Today we have been planning ahead with the American homemaker with Miss Frances Scudder, Director of the Division of Home Economics Programs, Federal Extension Service. Thanks for being our guest, Miss Scudder on "This Week's Agriculture, U.S.A."



